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## Purchase Intentions of Foreign Luxury Brand Handbags among Consumers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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### Abstract

Luxury products are purchased and adorned by people to display wealth, prosperity, success, social status or merely the satisfaction of a superior product quality. The dominance of any one of these reasons for luxury goods purchase is influenced by culture. None of such study was found in Malaysia. In this study, we explored the motivations to purchase luxury brand handbags among Kuala Lumpur consumers. Unlike others, we also consider income as an added factor in perceived customers' intentions to purchase in addition to the specific functional, experiential, symbolic, social influence; and trait of vanity dimensions. We used the self-administered questionnaires on 382 shoppers selected by the convenience sampling in major high-end shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Data was analysed for simple frequencies, factor analysis, correlation and hierarchical regression. Results indicate that functional value, vanity achievement and household income directly influence Malaysian consumers purchase intention for luxury goods. Marketing strategies to expand foreign luxury brand bags in Malaysia that incorporate these factors could have excellent chance of success.

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**Keywords:** purchase intention; luxury brand; hierarchical regression

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### 1. Introduction

Luxury brand products are expensive and often belong to the niche market. They are of high consumer

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involvement in information gathering and decision making process (Hollensen, 2011). They are purchased and adorned by individuals for many different motives. Product attributes stems from cultural values. Purchase of a designer handbag can be to display wealth, prosperity and success. These features were found abroad but there is little evidence found with Malaysian consumers. This study aims to examine the motivations for the purchase of luxury brand bags among Malaysian consumers. We also examine the influence of income in their perceived intentions to purchase luxury brand items. The purpose is to investigate the extent to which the functional, experiential, symbolic, social influence and trait of vanity dimensions influence purchase intention.

The appeal of luxury products is because they are rare, high quality, refined and exclusive (Bain and Company, 2012). These can again be differentiated into soft and hard luxury products. Soft luxuries encompass products such as fashion and clothing, while hard luxuries refer to watches and jewelry. The global market for such luxury products was estimated at about €150 - €180 billion annually.

In our study, a luxury brand is defined as “a branded product that is carefully crafted, unique, and conspicuous” (Hung *et al.*, 2011, p 458). We focused on the soft luxuries particularly bags and wallets. Handbags have been used before because it is not gender specific and it can carry functional, experiential and symbolic values which meets the requirement of this research (Hung *et al.*, 2011; Han *et al.*, 2010). Handbags have also been declared to be “the engine that drives luxury brands today” (Thomas, 2007 quoted in Han *et al.*, 2010, p 18).

## 2. Theoretical framework

Luxury goods are high involvement products. Hence consumers are involved in information gathering and decision-making processes (Hollensen, 2011). Individuals for a number of reasons adorn acquired products. The difference in sensitivity to a particular product attributes and motives for purchase can be ascribed to cultural values and product category. One may purchase the same designer handbag for diverging reasons such as to display their wealth, prosperity, success, establish social status or the perceived superior quality.

Berthon (2009) laid out at least three motivations for luxury brands purchase namely experiential, symbolic and functional. Hung *et al.* (2011) studied these in Taiwan. In the Malaysian context, we ask the same questions. Given the socio-economic condition, will consumers like to purchase luxury brands at all? These become our questions for this research. We use luxury brand bags i.e. handbags, men's bags, briefcases, wallets and purses as the main object of study.

Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) behavioural model generally referred to, as the Fishbein model has been well supported by empirical evidence and utilised in studies related to consumer attitudes and intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The model suggests that intentions to perform behaviours are influenced by subjective norm, attitude toward behaviour and perceived behavioural control.

External perceived behavioural control refers to a person's perception on the extent to which they are able to control external barriers. The most important barrier is price. The study concluded that once they achieve perceived control, intention to purchase foreign brand apparel would be developed (Jin and Kang 2011). This shows that people require sufficient disposable income in order to develop the intention to purchase luxury goods.

*H1: Income is positively correlated with purchase intention of luxury products.*

Focus on consumer purchase intention was due to the positive impact on a person's actions (Ajzen, 1991, Hung *et al.*, 2011; Jin and Kang, 2011) and has significance in brand consumption context (Berthon *et al.*, 2009). It is important to understand the interrelationships among people, products and brands in order to comprehend luxury brand consumption.

Vickers and Renand (2003) identified three dimensions as a distinguishing feature between luxury and non-luxury brands. The dimensions are;

- i. Functionalism
- ii. Experientialism
- iii. Symbolic Interactionism

We then use these hypotheses for testing ideas advocated by Hung *et al.* (2011) as follows:

*H2. Luxury brand perception is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H2a. Functional value perception is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H2b. Experiential value perception is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H2c. Symbolic value perception is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

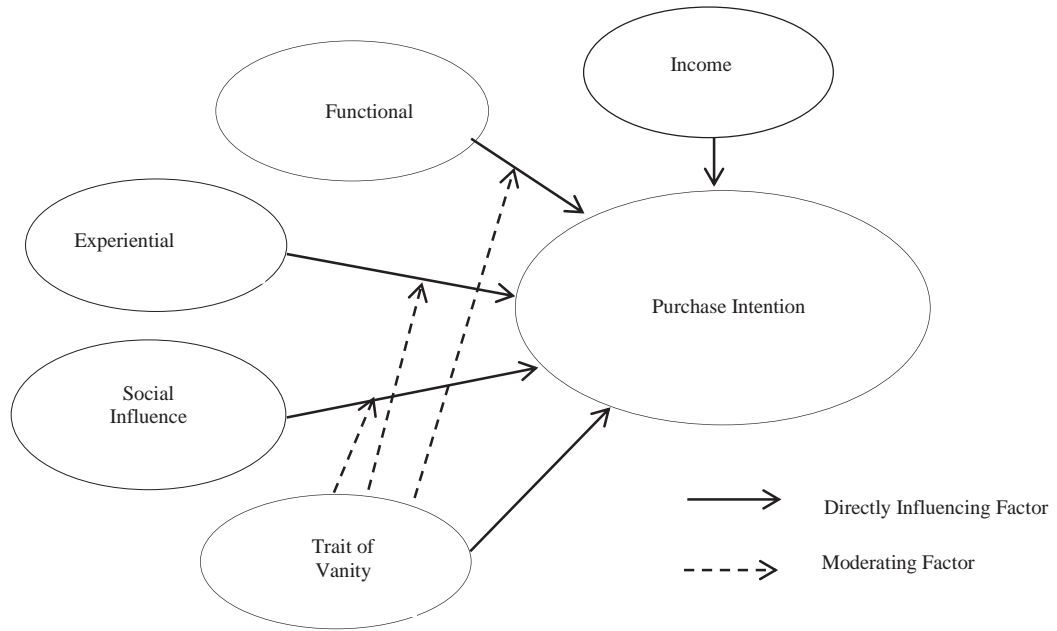
*H3: Social influence is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H4. Vanity is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H4a. Physical vanity is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

*H4b. Achievement vanity is positively correlated with purchase intention.*

Figure 1: Proposed Luxury Purchase Intention Model



Source: Author (2012), adapted from Hung *et al.* (2011)

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Design

This study adopts the questionnaire survey approach for data collection. The questionnaire consists of basic demographic questions and a five point Likert scale to measure purchase intention. The questions have been adapted from Hung *et al.*'s (2011) research on antecedents of luxury brand purchase intention. Emulating Hung *et al.*'s (2011) study, we focus on internationally well-known luxury brands available in Malaysia. This is to ensure that the respondents are accessible and familiar with the brands.

#### 3.2 Sampling Technique

The convenience sampling method was employed there is absence of a sampling frame. A total of 382 samples of Malaysians of 18 years and above were collected near four high end shopping malls that house luxury brands in Kuala Lumpur from the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2012 to 26<sup>th</sup> of August 2012. These malls are namely, The Gardens Mall, Suria KLCC, Starhill Gallery and Pavilion. The Gardens Mall is located in Mid-Valley City Kuala Lumpur. The remaining malls are located in Kuala Lumpur's Golden Triangle which encompasses three major streets; Jalan Raja Chulan, Jalan Imbi and Jalan Sultan Ismail bordering the entire triangle area. Jalan Bukit Bintang, known as the shopping and entertainment district is also located within this area. The four malls mentioned are listed as the popular shopping districts in Kuala Lumpur by Tourism Malaysia (2012).

The respondents were Malaysians of 18 years or older. They were first informed of the purposes of the survey and were asked for permission to be studied and that responses will only be used in aggregate in the research. They were also indicated to answer the questions independently without interference from other people.

#### 4. Results and Analysis

Data analysis was performed in four stages. The first stage is the data checking for suitability for further analysis. Then we analyse the data to describe the profile of the respondent including the mean scores of the measured scales of the various dimensions of the study. We further undertake a factor analysis in order to evaluate the performance with respect to the threshold factor loadings followed by a hierarchical regression analysis.

##### 4.1 Experiences with luxury brand product purchase

The respondents were asked about their purchase experience and some knowledge about some famous luxury brands. The reference products are lady's handbags, men's bags, purses or wallets. Table 1 presents the extent of experience in luxury product purchase by the respondents for self and their other relations.

Respondents who had experienced purchasing luxury bags, purses or wallets comprise of 66.9 per cent. Of these 81.8 per cent purchased these luxury brand products for themselves while 21 per cent are for their spouses. Luxury brand purchases are also made as presents for extended family members by 26.6 per cent of respondents. Purchase as gifts are by 12 per cent of respondents while 2.3 per cent bought as gifts for others.

Table 1: Purchase of Luxury Brand Bags and Wallets for Self and Others

Purchase of Luxury Brand Bags or Wallets	Per Cent
Purchase bags or wallet	66.9
Purchase for self-use	27.9
Purchase for spouse	21.2
Purchase for family members	26.6
Purchase for friends	12.0
Purchase for others	2.3

The most purchased brands are Coach, Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Other purchases are Prada, Channel, Burberry, Dior, Fendi, Tod's and Salvatore Ferragamo. About 24 per cent of respondents also experience purchase of brands beyond the provided list. They were also asked to state these brand purchases. These brands are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Incidence of Handbag or Wallet Purchase by Luxury Brands

Handbag or Wallet Brands	Per Cent
Coach	41.5
Louis Vuitton	27.9
Gucci	30.0
Prada	14.3
Channel	14.3
Burberry	11.6
Dior	7.8
Fendi	5.8
Tod's	6.6
Salvatore Ferragamo	9.7
Others	24.8

##### 4.2 Factor Analysis

Factorability of data was affirmed by the Bartlett's test for sphericity of data and sampling adequacy by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (Pallant, 2013). The results of these two tests are as shown in Table 3 below.

The KMO index value is no less than 0.6, which is considered to be respectable for a factor analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity using the  $\chi^2$ -statistics indicated statistical significance at  $\alpha=0.01$ . We confirm that the data can confidently be analysed by the factor analysis technique.

Table 3: Evaluation for Suitability for Running Factor Analysis

Luxury Purchase Dimensions	Kaiser-Meyer-Oikin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2$ )
Purchase Intention	0.7	559.4
Function Value Dimension	0.7	505.3
Experiential Value Dimension	0.9	1012.3
Symbolic Value Dimension	0.6	109.9
Social Influence	0.9	1149.5
Vanity Physical	0.8	1088.8
Vanity Achievement	0.8	524.4

All Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2$ ) are statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.01$ .

#### 4.3 Reliability

Each dimension of luxury purchase intention contains between three to seven constructs. The Cronbach's Alpha statistics to measure their internal consistency is shown in Table 4. The values of the Cronbach's Alpha are better than 0.7, a value above which indicates good internal consistency. For the Symbolic Value Dimension however, the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.567 which means that there could be some doubt about the internal consistency of the scales. However it is not below 0.5. Inter- item correlations of all dimensions are satisfactory, i.e. between 0.2 and 0.4 which makes Cronbach's Alpha below 0.7 acceptable (Pallant, 2013).

Table 4: Values of Cronbach's Alpha According to the Various Luxury Purchase Dimensions

Luxury Purchase Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha
Purchase Intention	0.867
Function Value Dimension	0.791
Experiential Value Dimension	0.888
Symbolic Value Dimension	0.567
Social Influence	0.865
Vanity Physical	0.872
Vanity Achievement	0.814

#### 4.4 Result of Factor Analysis

Linear relationship between household incomes is stronger than between personal income and purchase intention. This implies that additionally, consumers also reflect on household income when purchasing luxury goods. Other correlation coefficients show mixed strengths but are statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.01$ . The result indicates that the factor analyses are relatively sound.

Among the factors advocated by Hung *et al* (2011) is that consumers have their own perception on their purchases of luxury goods. First is that consumers may indicate whether they have the intentions to purchase luxury goods. Based on past studies, including that of Hung, the contributing components are as shown in Table 5. The values of the factor loadings for the various measured components are relatively high indicating that Malaysian consumers have strong intention towards luxury brand purchase. All factor loadings are better than 0.6, and eigenvalues of better than unity, a threshold value used by Hung *et al*. (2011).

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#### 4.5 Function Value Dimension

As indicated in Table 5, Function Value Dimension is, an unmeasured variable but indicated by the functionality of the product. This indicates that consumers' value handcrafted products because they relate to high quality, sophistication and superiority. Factor loadings are better than 0.6 while the associated eigenvalue is 2.490.

Table 5: Component Matrix for Function Value Dimension

Components	Factor Loading
I buy luxury brands bags because it is handmade (crafted)	0.650
I buy luxury brands bags because it has the best quality	0.823
I buy luxury brands bags because it is sophisticated	0.794
I buy luxury brands bags because it is superior	0.872
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Eigenvalue: 2.490	

The first factor considered to influence intention to purchase luxury products is the Function Value Dimension indicating that consumers value products because they are unique, attractive, rare, stunning and precious. Except for being handmade, factor loadings measured for all these traits in luxury products are about 0.8. Hence one reason why Malaysian consumers consume luxury products is because of their functional value.

### 5.6 Experiential Value Dimension

Customer experience in using luxury brand products gives them satisfaction. This product consumption is due to the product being unique, attractive, precious, stunning and rare. Factor loadings are all better than 0.8 with the associated eigenvalue of 3.45 as indicated in Table 6. The components are responsible for 69 per cent of the variance. Therefore Experiential Dimension is considered as vastly important to Malaysian luxury product consumers.

Table 6: Component Matrix for Experiential Value Dimension

Components	Factor Loading
I buy luxury brands bags because it is unique	0.847
I buy luxury brands bags because it is attractive	0.834
I buy luxury brands bags because it is rare	0.826
I buy luxury brands bags because it is stunning	0.825
I buy luxury brands bags because it is precious	0.825
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Eigenvalue: 3.45	

### 4.6 Symbolic Value Dimension

Luxury brand products are conspicuous, expensive are affordable by the wealthy. Malaysian consumers tend to disagree that these products are conspicuous. The factor loading measured was only 0.371 indicating that this is not important to them. On the other traits, the factor loadings just barely meet the threshold value of 0.6. The associated eigenvalue was 1.616. The dimension only contributed to 53 per cent of the variance in purchase intention. This concurs with Hung *et al* in their Taiwan study.

### 4.7 Social Influence Dimension

Social Influence is the connection between an individual consumer and the world. With increased exposure to the world from the globalisation process and foreign education, it has become important to them that they use these foreign luxury brands. How they respond to the seven questions that depicts this dimension is shown by the high factor loadings and a statistically significant correlation of 0.38 as shown in Table 7. Advice to luxury brand

marketer is that they should connect with the consumers through greater use of advertisements. This has become increasingly possible worldwide as cable and satellite television systems are increasingly becoming available in increasingly more countries.

Table 7: Component Matrix for Social Influence

Components	Factor Loading
Before purchasing a luxury branded bag, it is important to know what others think of people who use certain brands	0.836
I like to know what luxury branded bags make good impressions on others	0.825
I tend to pay attention to what other luxury brand bags others are buying	0.799
Before purchasing a luxury branded bag, it is important to know what kind of people buy certain brands	0.796
Before purchasing a luxury branded bag, it is important to know what brands will make good impression on others	0.706
My friends and I tend to buy the same brand of luxury items	0.639
I actively avoid using luxury branded bags that are not in style	0.603

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

#### 4.8 Vanity Physical

Vanity physical relates to consumers being conscious about the way they present themselves. In this sense, they will be embarrassed if they are not suitably dressed for occasions, which sometimes relates to the use of luxury brand products. It has a statistically significant correlation of 0.279 with purchase intention of Malaysian consumers. In Table 8, the various characteristics posed to the consumers all passed the factor analytical threshold value of 0.6 with an eigenvalue of 3.39.

Table 8. Component matrix for vanity physical

Components	Factor loadings
It is important that I look good	0.884
My appearance is very important to me	0.880
I will make effort to look good	0.838
I place high emphasis on my appearance	0.809
I would feel embarrassed if I was around people and did not look my best	0.693

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Eigenvalue:3.39

#### 4.9 Vanity Achievement

Vanity-achievement relates to the pride one holds to the achievement in career, education, life, etc. Its correlation with purchase intention is 0.390. Factor loadings are better than 0.6 in one and better than 0.8 for the other characteristics.

#### 4.10 Regression Analysis

A Hierarchical regression was undertaken to analyse the data with the scale scores on purchase Intention. This method of regression analysis is capable of evaluating the presence of moderating factor. In our case the moderating variables are the mean total scores for Vanity Physical and Achievement. In this analysis, the regression is carried out in two stages. The first stage is where the moderating variables are used as explanatory variables (Model 1) with Purchase Intentions as the dependent variable. This is followed by the estimation of the full model (Model 2). The result of the regression analyses is given in Tables 10 and 11.

The R-Square for Model 1 is relatively small indicating that Vanity-Physical and Vanity –Achievement explained only a small proportion of the variation in Purchase Intention. The full model, i.e. Model 2 explains 36.3 per cent of the variations in Purchase Intentions. Hence, when the Vanity-Physical and Vanity-Achievement is removed, the reduction in R-Square is 21 per cent. This is a significant contribution as shown by a statistically

significant change in the F-value.

Table 9: Change Statistic Due to Models 1 and 2

Model	R-Square	R-Square Change	F-Change	Sig. F-Change
Model 1	0.153	0.153	33.425	.000
Model 2	0.363	0.210	30.122	.000

By investigating Table 10, we find that both types of vanity have a significant relationship with Purchase Intention. However, in the full model, only the Vanity Achievement has t-value that is significantly different from zero. Total Functional Dimension and Household Income have t-statistics that are significantly different from zero. The results show that despite relatively high factor loadings in most variables, three variables contribute to luxury Purchase Intentions by Malaysian consumers. These are Vanity Achievement, Functional Value and Household Income.

Although we studied Purchase Intentions, Malaysian consumers when answering the questions intuitively look at their capacity to pay that is highly related to their income. Their income is again related to their achievements in life. This is indicated by the significant correlation of 0.241. They also consider the functionality of the product they purchased. Being expensive, it should be worth spending their income on these products.

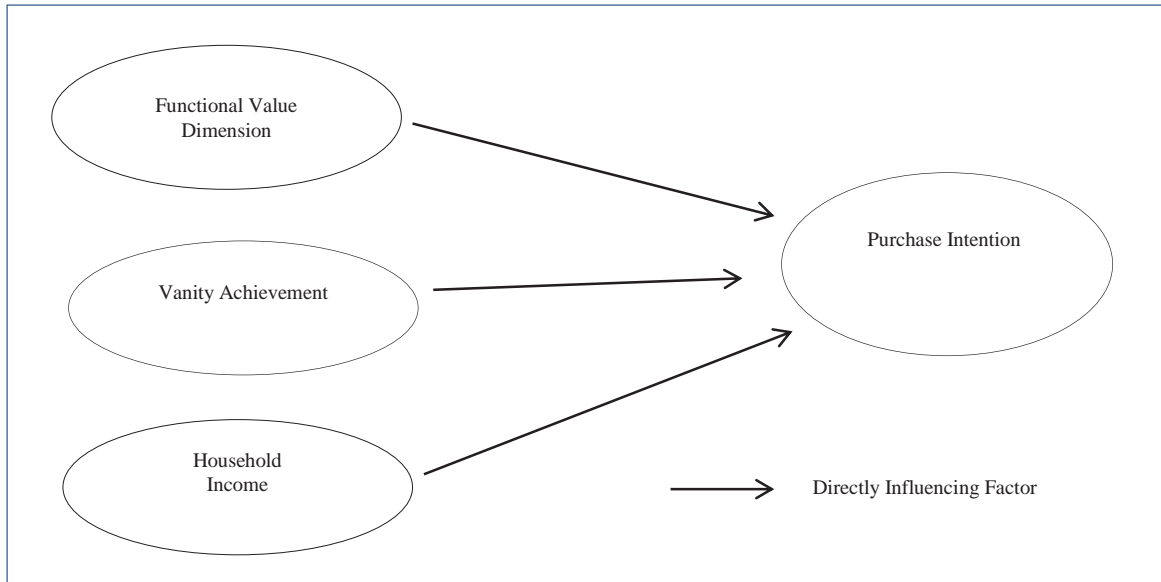
Table 10: Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis Purchase Intention as the Dependent Variable

Model	Independent Variables	Regression Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.526	4.197	.000
	Total Vanity Physical	.089	1.801	.073
	Total Vanity Achievement	.317	5.584	.000
2	(Constant)	0.138	.310	0.866
	Total Vanity Physical	-0.031	-.750	.479
	Total Vanity Achievement	0.186	3.803	.000
	Total Function Value Dimension	0.359	5.345	.000
	Total Experiential Value Dimension	0.330	1.351	.523
	Total Symbolic Value Dimension	0.03	.221	.825
	Total Social Influence	0.033	0.639	0.523
	Household income	0.498	4.516	.000

Based on the above result, we modify our model. Vanity Achievement, Income and function value of luxury products influence the Malaysian consumers to purchase luxury goods. The model is depicted in Figure 4.3. In the model, Vanity is not considered as a moderating factor but directly affects purchase intention. The regression coefficient is also not significantly different from zero meaning that it has no effect on the purchase intention. Income is also found to be important from a study by Nwankwo et al. (2014)



Figure 2: Modified Luxury Purchase Intention Model



## 7. Conclusions

The relatively high factor loading in the elements of some dimensions of Purchase Intention does not mean that it is a strong proposition that it will result in later purchases. The factors that have the potential for future purchase would be income. With high income, the consumers link to purchase intention. Other factors not linked to income will cause individuals to fail to form purchase intentions. That is why some respondents had refused participation in the survey. To them, there is no point in participating in a study about luxury goods because they have no resource to acquire them.

It is also the reason why Vanity Achievement instead of Vanity Physical that comes out to have a statistically significant t-statistic for the regression coefficient. Vanity Achievement is linked to income and therefore affordability. While being able to afford consumers would want to experience the quality, rarity and the high price of the luxury product.

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